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United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

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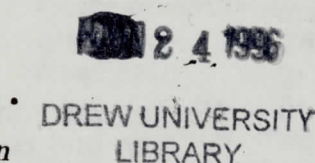
Number 2

SPECIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE ISSUE

Building/Developing a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Theology of Liberation...

...theme for Fall Gathering in
New York City October 18-20

Randy Miller, former National Affirmation Spokesperson, is convenor of the Program Design Team for this event and promises an exciting experiential time together. We've asked Affirmation constituents from the San Francisco area to comprise this team. It includes Gloria Soliz, Fritz Shultz, Kelly Love, Beulah Soliz and Karen Olivedo. They will be ready to share more details about the weekend's important and timely program in the upcoming August issue of this newsletter. Look for registration instructions in the August issue. Call National Affirmation for information needed before then.



Highlights of General Conference

Events affirming our rights never stopped during our time at General Conference (GC). Here are snippets of activities that many called a groundswell of powerful affirmation of gay/lesbian/bisexual Christians.

AFFIRMATION PR-GC EVENT: Affirmation hosted a two day pre-GC event where we talked about hope for our youth as the people who will inherit our church. We reflected on our own experiences with the church as youths. Some cried, some gained hope. Covenant support groups were formed for those who were attending GC to meet and talk about the inevitable highs and lows GC can create.

Please turn to page Two...



In This Issue

1996 Wheatley Awards.....	3.
An Interview with Tony Porter.....	4.
Reflections on Denver.....	5.
News of Local Groups.....	7.
Some Memories of Tim Tyner.....	9.
Personal Reflections on General Conference.....	10.

by Ben Roe

... from page One

AFFIRMATION WORSHIP: Bishop Fritz Mutti inspired worshippers with his own story of struggling for justice. He drew upon the Canaanite woman's story who asked for at least the crumbs under the table. She confronted Jesus to change his prejudices and minister to her. Jesus changed his mind and so will the church, prophesied Bishop Mutti. Minnesota Affirmation members created a meaningful litany of remembrance for all those who have inspired us and been leaders in this struggle.

AFFIRMATION AWARDS BANQUET: The banquet hall was full and everyone who was anyone was there. Balloons, confetti and flowers accented the delicious food. Awards went to the General Commission on Christian Unity (for becoming a Reconciling Commission), PFLAG (Parents & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) for its lifesaving family support and Milly and Howard Eychaner for their long and generous relationship with Affirmation. The crowd was wowed by the music and humor of Judy Fjell who drew upon her Lutheran roots to poignantly encourage Affirmation to keep on struggling!

AFFIRM! AFFIRM! Our newsletter was the information nerve center for gay/lesbian/bisexual news and analysis. Events like the Reconciling Congregation (RCP) press conference, youth rally and worship service might have slid by unnoticed if **AFFIRM!** press coverage had not been in the hands of delegates every morning at 6:00. The lavender newsletter has become a sought-out communication tool for the delegates and observers. **FOR A FULL SET OF NEWSLETTERS SEND \$25 TO AFFIRMATION AND REQUEST THE NEWSLETTERS.**

RECONCILING CONGREGATION PROGRAM kept the intensity high with its "OPEN THE DOORS" campaign. A press Conference with over 10,000 signatures of "Reconciling United Methodists" who want the doors open, and the witnesses of people whose lives have been scarred by the condemnation of the church—communion and baptism denied, jobs lost—all in the name of Christ. A Youth Rally turned heads and hearts with chants and the witness of Holly Peterson who tried to form a gay/lesbian/bisexual group in her Utah high school. The school closed all student organizations rather than allow Holly's group exist! Worship with preaching by Tex Sample of St. Paul School of Theology provided delegates an option for their Sunday Worship. Julian Rush's play, *Caught in the*



TAKE THIS AND EAT IT THIS IS MY BODY

MT 26:26

Middle, was commissioned by RCP. The family, faith and coming-out crisis story was buffeted by music, dance and campy humor, yet touched on almost every issue the church needs to face.

METHODISTS FOR SOCIAL ACTION worked hard on many justice issues and hosted *Harmony*, a gay/lesbian/bisexual chorus who regaled us with music ranging from Gregorian chant to campy Broadway. Intermission brought awards to Jean Audrey Powers, open lesbian UMC executive and pastor, and Bishop Talbert, for his long-standing support of justice for all. The music swept us up again and when we thought the house would come down with each new encore, messengers ran in and announced that the compromise legislation had made it out of the Church & Society Committee. Pandemonium broke out!

GENERAL CONFERENCE WITNESS EVENT General Conference was held in Denver over protests against Colorado's passage of Amendment 2 that denies rights to gay/lesbian/bisexual people. GC planners promised a "Witness Event" to counter the Colorado denial of human rights. Several witnesses spoke to human rights issues internationally, in prisons and elsewhere. Gay/lesbian/bisexual rights were placed in the context of all human rights. Randy Miller, Affirmation member, spoke eloquently about our rights, the dangers of living without them and confronted the church to change. ▽

1996 Wheatley Awards

Presented at General Conference

The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC), along with Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and Millie and Howard Eychaner received the Lucile and Mel Wheatley Award at a dinner on April 22.

The award is named in honor of Lucile and retired Bishop Mel Wheatley, who are among the United Methodist

pioneers in the journey toward full inclusiveness. The Wheatleys themselves were the first recipients of the award in 1994. For this year's

awards, Affirmation's national council selected designees in three categories: church related, society at large and individual.

The GCCUIC is being recognized for its ability to provide strong support for inclusiveness of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons while operating within the framework of the United Methodist *Discipline*.

In 1990 the GCCUIC became the first, and remains the only, general agency to name itself a Reconciling Commission under the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP), formally affirming full participation of lesbians, bisexuals and gay men in the life of the church. Other general agencies have introduced progressive legislation, and some have taken other supportive actions. Without discounting these forms of support, *AFFIRMATION* honors the GCCUIC for taking a step of public and permanent solidarity. In the face of a certain challenge, the Commission's act was bound to be challenged. However, both the GCFA and the Judicial Council eventually ruled that the decision was within the boundaries set by the *Discipline*.

More recently, when a member of its executive staff publicly affirmed her lesbian identity, the Commission declined to take the knee-jerk response of silencing or dismissing her. Here again, GCCUIC moved beyond private affirmation to a place of visible witness.

One of the important contributions the Commission has made is to demonstrate that restrictive provisions in the *Discipline* need not paralyze local congregations, annual confer-

ences and other agencies from acting on their conscience in affirming gay, lesbian and bisexual persons' full participation in the church.

PFLAG. The 1979 lesbian and gay March on Washington provided early impetus in the formation of PFLAG, which was formally organized by 16 parents in the summer of 1981. For much of its history PFLAG's main function has been to support family members and others when a relative or friend comes out. In many cases the family and friends become more effective relating to the lesbian or gay person. They in turn become more healthy in their own interactions within and outside the

family. More recently, PFLAG has also adopted a mission of social advocacy on behalf of lesbian and gay citizens. Parents are found in city halls, state legislatures, church gatherings and elsewhere helping to

create safe public and religious policies. The Wheatleys were early members of PFLAG and their participation has contributed greatly to the depth of its effectiveness, say PFLAG leaders.

Accepting the award for PFLAG were Tom and Elinor Lewallen of Denver, who attended the second meeting of the local PFLAG group and became hooked when a local United Methodist lesbian came and told her story. The Lewallens subsequently filled major leadership roles in PFLAG: Elinor was a national board member from 1983 to 1991, serving as president in 1987-88. Tom became a regional director and also served on the national board until 1991. The religious issues task force, created when Elinor was president, sent a delegation of five, including Elinor, to the General Conference study committee on homosexuality.

We give thanks to God for Tom and Elinor, Lucile and Mel, and the thousands of parents and family members they represent!

Howard and Milly Eychaner of DeKalb, Illinois, join the GCCUIC and PFLAG in receiving the Lucile and Mel Wheatley Award.

Howard and Milly are being celebrated for their eighteen years of work among United Methodists encouraging that the church doors be kept open for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons and other traditional "outcasts." They are lifelong United Methodists whose marriage was solemnized by a district superintendent and who brought their children, in their words, "to

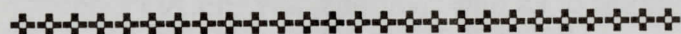
Please turn to page four. . .

...from page three

be baptized and committed to a life of love and service."

All four of Howard and Milly's children participated in the usual child and youth activities at church. However, now when invited to attend church with their parents, one reminds them that "my life is not compatible with the teachings of Christianity as taught by the United Methodist Church," and the other simply ignores the opportunity. This is the cost of the church's exclusion of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. Howard and Milly point out that as many as 25% of United Methodist families are affected by this exclusion.

Convinced that our denomination must change its attitude if it is to be faithful to the Gospel, the Eychaners have been tireless in their presence and their support. They work against silencing in their local church and annual conference and have been regular participants in the efforts of Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Program for many years. Thanks be to God! ▽



The following article is from AFFIRM!, Issue #4, April 19, 1996:

An Interview with Tony Porter

AFFIRM! staff members had a rare opportunity Wednesday evening to interview Tony Porter, the actor who portrays "Pastor John" in the Reconciling Congregation Program's production, "Caught in the Middle," an original musical drama which has been written especially as a gift for delegates and visitors to General Conference.

Porter has been a member of the Boulder, CO Affirmation Chapter since its inception, about 1 1/2 years ago. A banker by day, Tony is happy to have a chance to use his musical talents to help proclaim the good news of the RCP through this musical drama. He is a 1990 graduate of Mid America Bible College in Oklahoma City, where he received a bachelor's degree in music education.

Tony was delighted to be chosen for the role of Pastor John after going through a rigorous auditioning process. He says that the portrayal of his character has helped him learn something about himself and about his

life as an openly gay man. He says he can see something of himself in *all* the characters in the production and also identifies a lot of the action with events taking place in his home church in Boulder, First UMC, which is currently in the process of becoming a reconciling congregation.

Tony says that the fact that the play does not have a particularly happy ending is consistent with life today and the struggles of the people and churches he is familiar with. In real life, Tony says he is a "peacemaker" and can empathize with the play's conclusion and especially with the struggle of the character, Ted (the father). Tony says he feels all of the characters are caught in the middle of the struggle. As the character Sarah says, "it's just not enough," referring to the efforts of the church to help reconcile people's lives and the life of the church in coming to terms with the acceptance of gay and lesbian persons into the life and ministry of the church. ▽



1996/97 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE	PUBLICATION DATE
FALL	
July 20, 1996	August 20, 1996
WINTER	
October 15, 1996	November 15, 1996
SPRING	
February 1, 1996	February 22, 1996
SUMMER	
May 15, 1997	June 15, 1997

All submissions should be sent to:
George F. Hodgdon
Newsletter Editor

New Bedford, MA



Reflections on Denver

I was one of the many people of Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP) and MFSA (Methodist Federation for Social Action) who participated in the 1996 General Conference in Denver, CO. It was the first time I had ever attended a General Conference.

I have been asked many times to reflect on how this experience was for me. I've thought a lot about it. The best way I can explain it is to liken it to a roller coaster ride. The high was being with friends from all over the country. We get together at national meetings and conferences. Their support is most valuable to me. I met so many wonderful new people. I am proud and delighted to add them to my list of friends and support people.

As the General Conference opened we were given heart by the opening episcopal address by Bishop Judith Craig. We heard her urge members of the conference to open the church to all people regardless of status. Then we learned that 15 bishops had signed a statement saying they would uphold the *Book of Discipline* but that the sections setting aside rights to gay men and lesbian were painful for them to uphold. Still later we heard that after two days of closed-door meetings, the entire body of bishops basically said they would uphold the *Book of Discipline* [in its present form]. I didn't hear them condemn the first 15; the press read differently between the lines.

Then it was time for myself and my partner to leave Denver and to return home—before the Conference vote on our issues. We thought we were seeing a ground swell in our favor. We had bent over backwards to be polite to the Good News people. We had been there for meetings to share and to strategize. We helped write and distribute the daily *Affirm!*, the publication of Affirmation. We held one of the 43 panels listing the names of the 11,000 people who had signed the RCP petition as "Reconciling Methodists." We tried so hard.

Then, Wednesday afternoon the phone call came. Word had come from Denver. The vote was 60-40% against us. The good news was that the language won't be worse than it was. The bad news is that we didn't make any discernible progress. But how do you measure progress in this kind of struggle?

... please turn to Page Six-A

Affirmation National Council

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Paul Thompson
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Judith WestLee
Minneapolis, MN

Mark Wilson
Tuscaloosa, AL

Sam Wilson
Dallas TX

One woman in New York

Affirmation seeks to:

- coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;
- respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;
- sponsor education and information services;
- inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses.

I am interested in knowing more about:

- ☐ Becoming a member of national Affirmation and receive the quarterly newsletter.
- ☐ Upcoming national Affirmation Gatherings
- ☐ Affirmation groups or events in my region or city.
- ☐ Starting a local group.
- ☐ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation.

I enclosed a donation of \$ _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Annual Conference _____

All Affirmation correspondence is mailed discreetly.
All contributions to national Affirmation are tax deductible.

Mail to:

Affirmation
United Methodist for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, Illinois 60204

Affirmation and United Methodist Presence at Names Project Quilt Weekend, Washington, DC, October 11-13, 1996

Foundry United Methodist Church will be the site for a United Methodist hospitality space during the Names Project Quilt Weekend. It will be a place for quiet rest, fellowship and dialogue throughout the weekend. Mid-Atlantic Affirmation and National Affirmation are jointly planning our presence. This will include participation in the ecumenical worship at the National Cathedral, and a one-time gathering at Foundry, UMC, the day, time and keynote speaker to be announced in the August issue of this newsletter. ▽

The Other Biblical Text *From AFFIRM! #6, April 22, 1996*

We hear arguments that same gender covenantal relationships are un-Biblical and un-Christian. How then are we to understand 1 Samuel 18:1-4, labeled "Jonathan's Covenant with David" in the NRSV Bible?

The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

The story of their love goes on for pages as the two men hug, kiss, exchange clothing, and weep upon separation. When Jonathan dies, David laments,

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Some of us know that covenant love. How can the church say it is "incompatible with Christian teachings" even as it tells us that Scripture is the cornerstone of our faith? ▽

...Reflections on Denver, from Page Four

I learned the banner on the bottom of the Thursday and Friday Affirm! was "See You in Cleveland." This is a reference to the fact that the next General Conference in year 2000 will be in Cleveland, OH. I shed a tear. Yah, they'll see me in Cleveland, too. This is my church, too, and I'm not going away.

I remember Bishop Craig's ending of her address: She said that night in the upper room at supper it was not all peace and harmony. She reminded us that there was dissent, one of the table-sharers was about to betray their leader, others were arguing over who was greater than the rest. Yet even in the midst of this, Jesus stayed at the table. He didn't get up and walk away. And I plan to stay at the table and with The United Methodist Church, too.

But all in all, being at General Conference was one wild roller coaster ride for me! ▽

Judy WestLee



**THE GREATEST WILL BE
THE ONE WHO SERVES
THE REST. MT 23:11**



**BUT SHE GAVE FROM
HER WANT**

MK 12:44

Affirm Affirmation!

For two weeks in Denver, Affirmation Council members and volunteers worked endless hours to produce a newsletter, host an awards banquet, organize a worship service, monitor legislation, lobby delegates and support each other in the journey.

Those of you who made special donations to the work of Affirmation at General Conference can stand with pride alongside each volunteer who was there. We were not just a **PRESENCE** at General Conference, we were a **FORCE! YOUR VOICE WAS HEARD!**

Few can afford to take two weeks off to volunteer. Those who could, depended on everyone to help pay the cost of the office space, machine rental, printing and on and on. Some of the costs were higher than expected.

You can still be a part of it! If you are glad that working volunteers were there, write a check now. Send it off! If you gave before, give another donation as an expression of thanks to those who were there for you and with you.

Our commitment to this work is growing. Be a part of it. Stand proud with those who made a difference at this General Conference. Be on this side of the growing wave of support. So often people said, "I'm so glad I'm here to witness the changes!" Be among those who make it happen.

Plans for next General Conference are already in the minds and hearts of dedicated Affirmation members. Make a decision today to give generously and more frequently to Affirmation. The work is happening and the church is changing! You are part of it! Thank you for standing proud! ▽

Full Court Press

"It was a full court press" stated one right-wing critic to describe the activities of those who supported gay/lesbian/bisexual rights at General Conference. Affirmation was in the center of the action at the quadrennial legislative meeting of United Methodists in Denver, Colorado, April 14-26, 1996.

Affirmation volunteers provided a powerful and informative presence at General Conference. *AFFIRM!*, our daily newsletter, was at the doors by 6:00 each morning. *AFFIRM!* updated delegates and observers on legislation, announced events, analyzed decisions and critiqued realities facing gay/lesbian/bisexual persons.

The mood of General Conference was very supportive. . .

The work of Affirmation, Reconciling Congregations Program (RCP), Methodists for Social Action (MFSA) seemed like a well choreographed combination of worship services, banquet, newsletters, celebrations, press conference, youth rally, witness event, theater debut, outspoken delegates and dissenting bishops. The mood of General Conference was very supportive of gay/lesbian/bisexual people.

Right-wing advocates showed their colors early on with a motion to disallow all legislation proposed by unofficial groups of the

church, including Good News, Institute for Religion & Democracy, Affirmation, RCP, MFSA and others. They seemed clear that their legislation was not going to pass so they wanted to take as many down with them as they could.

Midway through General Conference, 15 bishops released an historic statement of dissent from the current condemnation of homosexuality. Despite the ground swell of support and the defensive posture of the right wing, progressive legislation on our issues did not get the votes needed.

Despite the right-wing upsurge . . . we continue to move forward . . .

The linchpin legislation was a compromise drafted by the Iowa Conference that said some United Methodists think that homosexuality is incompatible with Christianity and some do not. There was a palpable shock among delegates and observers when the compromise language was rejected. The church had voted to deny the truth that we are divided on this issue, by about a 40/60 split.

Even though the negative stance of the denomination stays the same for another four years, progress was made. Affirmation veterans of twenty-five years of General Conferences repeatedly talked about how far we have come. Despite the right-wing upsurge of the 90's, we continue to

move forward rather than be defeated. The cause of justice for lesbian/gay/bisexual people continues to transform the hearts of well-meaning people who have been taught that Christianity and homosexuality don't go together. Once people change their minds they do not go back.

Jesus' parable of the widow, in Matthew 18:1-8, still rings true for the possibility of justice. The widow kept pestering the judge to give her justice against her opponent. "For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God nor respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice...'" "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to the ones who cry out day and night?" I tell you, God will...." (NRSV Adaptation)

We are like drops of water that wear away the stone. Women struggled twenty-five years to gain access to ordination and just celebrated 50 years of women's ordination.

"... the rock will wear away."

There is no time for hopelessness, only for continued pestering of those in power to bring justice to a long standing grievance.

"Can we be like drops of water, falling on the stone? Weaker than the stone by far, but be aware that as time goes by, the rock will wear away." (Meg Christian, Olivia Records)✓

LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Dallas Affirmation At their March General Meeting, the group welcomed Marilyn Bennett Alexander, the co-author of We Were Baptized Too-. During the April General Meeting, Mac McPherson spoke to the group. Dallas Affirmation meets for a monthly pot luck dinner with fellowship and program every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. For additional information write to [REDACTED] Dallas, Texas [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED].

Affirmation Los Angeles Rev. Janie Spahr, lesbian, feminist, and Presbyterian minister met with Los Angeles Affirmation during their March Meeting. She inspired her listeners by sharing her understanding of how important it is that all of us in the church continue the struggle for full inclusion of all persons. At the April meeting the group viewed "One Nation Under God" which examines the so-called ex-gay movement. Affirmation Los Angeles meets the second Sunday of each month for programs, worship, refreshments and fellowship at Holman UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more information write to [REDACTED] West Hollywood, CA [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED].

Cape Cod Affirmation meets on the first Sunday of each month at 3:00 p.m. at the Osterville UMC. Following the meeting the group goes to a local restaurant for a light Sunday supper. For more information write George Hodgdon, [REDACTED] West Yarmouth, MA [REDACTED] or call him at [REDACTED].

Nashville Affirmation In March the group met for dinner and fellowship at the International House of Pancakes. In April the group gathered at San Antonio Taco Company. At the June meeting the group plans to meet at Edgehill UMC for an evening of forum and dialogue with an invited guest. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, [REDACTED] Nashville, TN [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED].

Shalom Ministries Fifty-two participants traveled to Corvallis First UMC for the second Building the Spirit Retreat. Those attending considered the ways that churches can "come out" as reconciling communities. Other members of Shalom Ministries attended Portland's Community of Welcoming Congregations ecumenical event. Featured speaker was Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. There are a variety of support groups are held throughout the week by Shalom Ministries. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to P.O. Box 66147; Portland, OR 97266 or call [REDACTED].

Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when, and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, [REDACTED] San Francisco, CA [REDACTED].

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We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.

Editor's Note: The block prints used to illustrate this issue are by Helen Siegl from the clip art book *Block Prints for Sundays Cycles* published by Pueblo Publishing Co., Inc.



Beyond Reconciliation?

Affirmation has started the reconciling process through the establishment of the Reconciling Congregation Program, but is this enough? From the various stories about the recent General Conference, there are many Methodists who do not respond to or agree with our requests for "equal rights" and acceptance as human beings. Perhaps we should emphasize our "spiritual" accomplishments more, rather than always asking for (begging for?) our equal rights. Back in the 50's or early 60's someone wrote a musical for the youth of our church, which included a song titled *The Gimme, Gimme Blues*. Does that have a familiar ring?

It is interesting to note that Mr. Comstock also points out in his newest book that gays in organized religion are much more active as church leaders than are the non-gays. Perhaps all we have to do is shout louder about our accomplishments within The United Methodist Church, brag a little more about our "spiritual" gifts and, who knows, maybe in another ten or twenty years the only criticism we'll hear about gays in the church is that we are not tending to our "spititual" responsibilities as we should! ▽

(Please note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the editor and not necessarily those of National Affirmation.)

Some Memories of Tim Tyner

In September of 1985 I traveled to Evanston, IL, to attend Affirmation's 10th birthday celebration at Wheadon UMC. Traveling from Texas were two men by the names of Gene Leggett and Tim Tyner. Gene was Affirmation history and Tim had been a member of the Dallas local group since 1982.

Tim was around my age, and I remember he and I both being involved in the group discussions on Regional Organizing that occurred during that weekend. I felt drawn to this Southern Evangelistic Gay Christian man.

I later learned that Tim and his lover, Jim Wardlow, began attending Dallas Affirmation in 1982. Tim was practicing in law and enjoyed the fellowship and support that Affirmation provided; it was much like gay and lesbian MYF. They became Affirmation regulars.

Tim believed that Affirmation is part of an initiative of the Holy Spirit to bring gay men and lesbians into the Church and the Church to a fuller embodiment of the inclusive love of God. In a sense we are modern-day circuit riders, bringing the Gospel to our community—a community desperately in need of the Word of hope, faith and love in these times of AIDS and discrimination.

Tim started to bring more Dallas Affirmation regulars to National Meetings like Ed Young and Mike Merrifield. Tim continued his work in Affirmation Regional Organizing throughout the Southwest. Thanks to Tim, Affirmation ads were seen in gay rodeo booklets.

Tim joined the Affirmation Coordinating Committee the spring of 1987. He continued serving on that committee until changes were made in how Affirmation did business. At this time the Committee became a Council and in 1990 Tim continued to serve Affirmation on its newly elected Council. Tim's participation on the Council ended in 1992.

In Dallas, after his lover Jim died of AIDS, Tim decided to quit law as a profession and to follow his calling. He began his studies for the minstry at Claremont in Southern California. He became active in the local Affirmation group again, and became good friends with Bert All, one of the original founders of Affirmation/LA.

During these years I learned a lot from Tim about integrating all these various parts of myself that get separated in my attempts to just try to strengthen my identity as a gay man or a Christian or a man. With Tim I could talk trash and appreciate all the beautiful people around us and still feel connected to God and the Spirit.

Tim was very proud of his Native American heritage. At Seminary, Sunday evenings were spent in fellowship with a United Methodist Native American Group. I remember going to see Tim ordained at the Cal/Pacific Annual Conference; a group of his Affirmation friends stood to one side watching while he participated in a Native American Blessing.

Tim was appointed to a United Methodist Church with a Native American population in Spokane.

Tim was then appointed back to Southern California at a church in San Diego called Normal Heights UMC. The name was not lost on Tim or any of his friends as he settled into his ministry there. I was fortunate to experience one of his worship services before driving up to Bert All's memorial service. Tim continued with his ministry until he went on disability last Fall with AIDS related illnesses. His D.S. and church were very supportive of him at this time. After Danny died last winter, Tim was ready to meet his Maker.

His mother was there to take care of him while he was sick. The week before his death was spent happily with family members. There was a memorial service at Normal Heights UMC in San Diego. Tim's body was returned to Oklahoma where his parents currently live.

Tim passed away during General Conference which he had hoped to attend. Tim loved the Methodist Church. Tim loved his time with Affirmation, getting to know people from all over the country.

The memory of Tim will be loved, cherished and appreciated by all those who knew him in Affirmation and I take comfort in knowing he is being held tightly in the arms of his Savior and surrounded by his friends.

Fritz Schultz



New York! New York!

Make your vacation plans now! Be in New York City, October 18-20, 1996, for the Affirmation Gathering. Start your week in Washington, DC, October 11-13 to see the AIDS quilt and work your way up the coast to the Big Apple!

Limited free housing will be provided in New York. An excellent Youth Hostel and International House provide low cost housing and hotel packages are being explored. **DON'T LET COST TURN YOU AWAY!** Mark those dates on your calendar!

TOUR THE BIG APPLE! Do a tour of gay/lesbian NYC! Do the shopping tour! Do a museum tour! There's even a "NYC Nature" tour for the October leaf lover! Let them eat their hearts out at home while you eat your way through the culinary delights of NYC's fabulous and reasonable restaurants. Local Affirmation people and NYC pundits are putting together tour suggestions complete with maps and travel tips.

Once you've seen it all, done it all—and yes, eaten it all—and got the T-shirt, you'll be ready for a weekend of being the church within a church.

Affirmation lays claim to our right to be gay/lesbian/bisexual **and** Christian. Our lives contribute to the

theological weaving that makes up the tapestry of Christianity throughout the world. We will explore the theology that continues to be born out of the joys and the suffering of our lives.

AFFIRMATION is a prophetic voice that lets no one doubt that our passionate God loves love whenever it is deep, constructive, life giving and liberating. When we gather this October in the rainbow of fall colors, we will celebrate our lives and our God who breathes love and craves justice. ▽



Some Personal Reflections on General Conference

by Ben Roe

This was the first time I'd attended General Conference as a person who is very interested in sexuality and sexual orientation.

Partly because I didn't want to hear the kinds of things that I knew would be said about people I knew and loved, I chose to stay in the background and provide computer technical support to the **WARM** caucuses (**W**omen's **C**aucus, **A**ffirmation, **R**CP and **M**ethodist **F**ederation for **S**ocial **A**ction).

I very much enjoyed by contact with the people of the caucuses. I think sharing space with MFSA and the Women's Caucus was good for those of us who were mostly interested in the sexual orientation issues. We were in a context of a broader set of concerns, especially in the case of MFSA, an organiza-

tion that has been through the mill on any number of social justice issues over the past 90 years.

In fact, the most powerful part of the whole experience for most people was the fact that at the very next session following the vote that declined to admit that "we are not of one mind" and that kept the doors closed as before, there were people at every door greeting those who returned from dinner. This was part of the Open the Doors campaign of RCP, and it was a powerful witness.

A Witness Event was planned to witness to the need for honoring the civil rights of all people in the face of the passage of Amendment 2 in Colorado. I was really disappointed at the fact that the intent of the Witness was undercut by the choice of speakers and the speech he chose to make. But the witness of Randy Miller was quite fine! He spoke gracefully, forcefully and truthfully about his experiences—the first openly gay man ever to address the General Conference! I was inspired and grateful. I was also pleasantly surprised at the witness of the woman who followed him, Minerva Carcano, from Albuquerque, who spoke about racism, sexism and homophobia.

What excitement I experienced when I read about the statement from the 15 bishops! Finally they were taking leadership on this issue seriously. And I was disappointed at the bland statement that followed the two days of meetings they held about it. But the silence had been broken. There were 15 who had put their names on the line

... Please turn to page Eleven

... from page Ten
(and others who said they would have if they had been asked). The winds of change are blowing through the Council of Bishops, too.

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One of the 15 bishops who signed the first statement, Fritz Mutti of the Kansas Area spoke at the Affirmation worship service on Friday. His witness was humble, genuine, creative and hopeful. The spirit of the congregation was wonderful. The singing was inspiring. I particularly enjoyed the spontaneous inclusive-language translation of one of the hymns—it was nearly unanimous! And one of my friends, David Dunn (who attended from the host church) has remarked that he experienced unconditional love in that group.

David also has said that he experienced that same spirit at St. Paul's UMC at the performance of the musical *Caught in the Middle*. He was moved to tears, he said, because he had never known that kind of love in his entire life.

The musical was a powerful witness, and moved me to tears nearly every time I saw it. About 1200 people saw it over the 11 performances. Opening night was on my 50th birthday, and what a wonderful celebration! It was held at Boulder First UMC, where there was a warm homecoming from over 350 in attendance for Julian Rush, who had left there many years ago after being outed. Jean Hodges, the playwright, is a regular at the Boulder meet-

ings of Affirmation, and has been a wonderful witness and encouragement to me. One of the characters in the play was a gay minister who had turned in his credentials. Jean based the character on a man she had met at the RCP Convocation last year. Jean shared that she had written the bishop who wrote the rather cold and impersonal response that was used in the musical, and suggested that he might consider apologizing for the lack of compassion in the letter. He did so, and sent her a copy.

Once again, I saw the fruits of commitment, vision and perseverance over the long haul . . .

Sunday morning at St. Paul's UMC was another powerful time. Tex Sample preached on one of my favorite subjects: the fact that Jesus got in such hot water with the religious leaders of his day. Tex said some plain words about some Pharisees in our time who exclude folks from the faith. But what really got to my depths was the anthem, *All Are Welcome*, which I helped to perform. (I must say that part of my emotion was due to the contrast with a particularly difficult meeting at my own church about the Reconciling Congregation Program the week before General Conference.)

The Affirmation dinner and Wheatley Awards presentation was another high moment. Once again, I saw the fruits of commitment, vision and perseverance over the long haul in Bishop and Lucile Wheatley, after whom the awards are named, and in those honored. Judy Fjell's performance was moving as

well, with the new words to *Amazing Grace* being really helpful to me.

One experience illustrates the importance of the individual conversations. The youth delegate from very conservative Colorado Springs found himself skiing with some Affirmation folk over the weekend. During that time, there was some sharing of life stories. At the debate, [on the Conference floor] this delegate spoke of his confusion about part of the issue, and his clarity about the fact that "the language of the Discipline excludes and condemns our homosexual and lesbian brothers and sisters." He went on to witness to the hospitality of Jesus to Matthew, the tax collector, whom he did not ask to change before he would sit at table with him.

"truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne; yet that scaffold sways in the future . . ."

In summary, it was through the energy of the events held outside of the conference and through the individuals and the conversations between them that God's spirit blew hard through this General Conference. Someone from MFSA quoted the words to *Once to Every Man and Nation* after the vote: "truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne; yet that scaffold sways in the future. . . ." There was truth told, there was genuine witness to joy and pain, there was meeting of soul with soul in the midst of it all. There was God present around the edges with the marginalized, as God has always been. My prayer is that God's spirit can please turn to page Twelve

